

An Interview with Tom Lefler



Interviewed by Dean Duncan
Theatre and Media Arts Department History Project 2011

My name is Thomas J. Lefler—that's the formal handle. I was raised in the mountains of Utah above Heber, in the Kamas, Utah area, in a town called Woodland. It's about as small as you can get. My family homesteaded that area, probably in the 1870s. Some of my family came as Mormon immigrants, but the rest of them were just following other family members, and actually weren't members of the Church. My father was a banker, my mother a homemaker. We became a family of ten children, and I was raised in a fairly conservative, simple life. I graduated and came to BYU as a freshman, then went on a mission to the Eastern Atlantic States Mission, which is the Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania area.

Then I came back to BYU, and after three years of schooling, decided I should probably graduate in something. I got an English major, and then decided to work on a master's program in English, which I did the coursework for, but I never wrote my thesis. Then I got burned out of an apartment, and with Laura Ellis—who I married, who was a convert to the church—took off to Salt Lake City. I went through a numerous series of jobs over a couple years until I was hired at the Utah Film Commission. So I got involved in filmmaking after I actually left school. Then after two or three years at the Film Commission, I was hired on at the Motion Picture Studio as a studio administrator. I was there for approximately eight or nine years and then came to BYU campus, and I've been here ever since. That's the short version.

It wasn't too difficult an adjustment from literature to film. I love literature, but I was always interested in storytelling and the power of stories. I don't think I was really prepared for scholarly work, and I didn't want to be a scholar, necessarily. I wanted to be a practitioner, but I never wrote much as a young person. If the theory is you have to do ten thousand hours of something to become really good at it, I had not done much—there was no opportunity to do something.

Finally, I actually recognized that film was what I wanted to do, and then I got an introduction. But by then I had so little confidence that I never finished my thesis. That would have led to a PhD or something, some career like that, and that probably wasn't really suited for me. So I wasn't happy about literature and scholarship. I was searching; I was looking for something that kind of seemed to fit, and film seemed to fit okay.

Young Mormon guys, at least from my generation, just got married and had kids, and woke up one day and said, "Gee, I've got kids. What do I do?"

I remember one period between jobs when I decided I was going to write—do the ten thousand hours, right? I think I went three days, and then my wife stopped talking to me. I thought, *Wait a minute, this doesn't seem to be working out very well.* Even though I'd done some writing, and—if I'd pushed through and left my family and gone somewhere and just bored down on it—I probably could have done something with that piece of my imagination. But there are practical things. Instead I think I went and got a job building swimming pools. *Well, there's bread on the table.*

The thing of it is that you always wonder why you're born where you're born, and wonder about the upbringing you get and the opportunities you have, and what that means in terms of what you're supposed to be doing with your life. There's got to be some meaning to those types of issues for who you are and who you're supposed to become. Maybe it was the best place for me to be; maybe that's what I was supposed to do; maybe that's the contribution I was supposed to make. Maybe I was not supposed to be in some other place, and who knows why. You have to, at some point, become comfortable with it and move on.

At BYU, we've had a tendency to be a little selective in our program—I mean we started out as a BFA program. That was a little like where you took the select few and gave them an opportunity to do what you couldn't quite do if you had more numbers. But I'm not necessarily sure that really suits BYU—at least who we are as a people and as a community. I think we decided we had to give more people opportunities. They're going to have to work it out in some point in their lives, and everybody has to take

their own path and figure out where it leads at some point. If I had had the regimentation to work eight hours, then come home and do the family thing for three or four hours, and then burn the oil lamp at night, I maybe could have done more than I've done. Maybe I'm still supposed to do it; I'm not dead yet, so maybe there's still something I could possibly do that could make some sense. I actually recently ran into an article I was writing a few years ago that no one seemed to think was very good—or at least one person didn't—and I looked at it and I thought, *You know, this really isn't that bad. Maybe I should go back into this and see if there something there for it.*

I wrote that thesis, which was interesting in its own time, but it's not my final feelings about film and transcendence and all that business. I didn't finish the conversation; I probably should finish the conversation, because I don't actually believe what I wrote in my thesis. I think you have to keep pushing; I think everything moves along and evolves, obviously personally, but I think in more ways. Even though we look around us and think that everything's pretty stable, I think everything is in free flow, much more than I ever imagined when I was young.

We honor the kinesis a little bit at BYU, because we let students mostly do what they want to do. We can certainly be a lot more heavy-handed about it, and I think that the director-type faculty members in our program certainly try to be open, some more than others. So the students do get an opportunity to play at it in some fashion.

But when you're that young, you don't even know enough to know what you don't know, right? In some ways, it's probably wasted on them, because if they were sixty, and quit worrying about who they think they are and that part of the whole dilemma, they might be better off. But I don't know how to bring those two ends of your life together in some sort of perfect setting to do what you should be doing.

I don't know if I want to turn myself too philosophical here, because I'm not sure I could actually get to the end of the sentence. There's a theory that the apocalypse has actually already happened, that Christ's incarnation is here and evident, and his presence is here—we've always had the impression that somehow he's someplace else. We get to do our thing here for a while, then we maybe go see him at the end, and he tells us whether or not we're an A student or B student or C student. But if we were more thoughtful in thinking about the implications of his presence with us here—looking over our shoulder—we might not do some of the things we do, and we might be a little more serious about the work we do. That's clear on the end of the philosophical ruler, I guess.

I have moved from focusing on transcendence to eminence. I've been reading the Bonhoeffer biography; as he got closer to the end of his life, and he knew it, and he was in prison, he had a daily observance about the fact that the Sermon on the Mount was something really eminent. He saw himself always in the presence of Christ, and always having to live his life with those things. Every moment. He said the moment you start thinking seriously about that, you're very close to the moment of your death. He clearly believed that, and when I read through his biography, I realized what real pressure comes to you when you take that seriously. Those that were with him said he went to his death as peacefully as any person you could imagine; he really believed there was no need to worry about it, because it was going to be much easier when he stepped across that line—or through that veil, or whatever you want to call it.

I believe that if we thought more about that in terms of what we do—not only in our personal interrelationships, but also in how we do creative work—it might have a real impact on us. I'm not sure there are any practical things that you can do. I'm not even sure if you can get a community to work at that level together. It's an individual thing, and it's your influence on those around you that maybe make things happen in a way that makes things more meaningful. I think about that a lot more; I'm trying to read my Psalms every day, and as Bonhoeffer said, Christ quoted from the Psalms, and we could do worse.

Brigham Young University

My life's been interesting—we're getting personal here. I was talking to somebody a few days ago about my experience at BYU, and she asked me if I had any interest in doing work of my own at some point. We're somewhat limited here at BYU of doing any really aggressive documentary work that takes on subjects considered to be interesting, because they're immediate and meaningful.

I said, "I didn't really ever think about myself as being a creative force; I never really took myself that seriously."

I was always trying to find a place where I thought I could fit and make a contribution. That's what I've tried to do, I guess, in terms of my role here. I'm not really a faculty member—I guess I just somehow found my way here. I'm not sure how to phrase that.

I have found fulfillment in some ways. I've also been a thorn in some people's side in the process of doing that. But for the most part, I found real satisfaction in it. I wish we had a little more latitude and liberty at BYU, but BYU has to be what BYU is. You need to be here and figure out how you fit inside that model.

But I've always wondered if I was supposed to be something else. That's the danger.

You come to my point in life, where you are at the end of your career and you say to yourself, "Well, did I end up being where I was supposed to be? It seems like I was able to make a contribution of some sort, so maybe that was okay, maybe that's where I was supposed to be." But then you say to yourself, "But maybe that's not who I was supposed to be."

There's a piece of me that's very practical, and I've always believed that if you make an agreement to do something, if you set a parameter—whether or not it's a class room parameter or a project parameter—you say, "I agree to do what I agree to do."

There have always been limited resources at BYU—well, during the early years—the students these days don't even know how awful it was. Even sometime later, we were just taking what was left over from twenty or thirty years earlier and trying to make do with it. I became a bit of a scavenger, I think. Because of that, I acquired an attitude that I was going to find the resources and hide the resources. I get complained about, I get made fun of—by the chair and the dean and everybody else—because I have pockets of resources that I've pooled away. It was only in an effort to create a means where we could consistently get the equipment the students needed to do an adequate job, because you never have enough. Most students believe they have to have the world to make a film, when in reality they don't.

I've acquired the attitude that I'm the "No" person, and maybe that's been good. Limitations are the key. You have the openness in terms of imagination, and in terms of your own personal time. From the imagination standpoint, you can come up with anything you want to come up with, but once you decide to actually start taking resources or convincing other people to help you with your project—that is a gift from them, but you didn't always see it that way.

If you take a particular view of it, you could say, "Because I'm the smartest one here of the bunch, I deserve to have it. There has to be a chief and there have to be Indians, and I'm obviously a chief."

I think there's real power in trying to figure it out—build a box and then figure out inside the box how you can make this happen. We stopped thinking at some point.

I don't know if I have any examples. I simply think that students that don't take themselves too seriously—in other words, they don't try to put themselves into a particular category of however they want to categorize themselves, but they are earnest, and have less than more—they always seem to do better work. I think they find a way to do it.

In some ways, teams are better even than individuals. There have been times over the years when we've had students who've decided to work together. They somehow learned how to complement each other, and I think they have done some of the best work—either because 1) individually they could

manage whatever they were attempting to do because it was small and they scaled it properly; it wasn't so big that they couldn't do it, and so they figured out how to get it done; or 2) if it was larger, then they said, "Well, I can't do this by myself. I've got to find some other people who I can believe in, and they can believe in me." I think they've been successful in the work they've done. That's such a hard thing to figure out how to do, and some people are gifted to recognize it, perhaps earlier than others.

In filmmaking, you are working with life skills. You're learning some concepts and some theories and some other things, but you're also learning to work with people. If you can do that, then there's always ample resources—at least I think there's ample resources here. Any student can get what he wants to if he can demonstrate that he has the imagination and the wherewithal, along with other students, to pull something off.

But they get caught inside of their own little perspective: "But if I can't have that, then I can't do what I *really* want to do!"

If they would just demonstrate more than pontificate—or whatever you want to call it—then they could basically do whatever they want to. No one's going to say no to students who are prepared, who are engaged, who are hard workers, who don't overestimate who they are, and who are humble.

Maybe those are traits that we'd like to reinforce more, but we probably don't. That's the challenge—the challenge is: are you at the right point in your life to do what you want to do? Do you have the resources and can you make the relationships? It's all about community at some point; it really is, it's important.

Motion Picture Studio and Film Program History

I'm not really good with dates, so I'm just going to give some general overviews. I came to the Motion Picture Studio, I think, in 1982, from the Film Commission. I was hired by Peter Johnson—actually it was Dean van Uiter; this was not a Dean Dean, his name was Dean. I thought he was a Dean, but he was just Dean.

I remember going to the Motion Picture Studio, and I realized I was coming in at a time of transition: it had been decided that film was going to reside in the Theatre and Media Arts Department—Theatre and Film or Theatre and Cinematic Arts may have been the name at that particular point—it was not going to be over in Communications. At some point they were offering some classes on filmmaking in Communications. Some of those guys were actually communications majors: I believe that Reed Smoot and Kieth Merrill were. They had been out at the Motion Picture Studio, working during the Jesse Stay years, which was after the Whitaker brothers retired. Jesse Stay came on for six or seven years, and then Peter Johnson. Peter Johnson was hired to come to the Motion Picture Studio to take over the studio and also to put into place a formal film program. As I recall, Tad Danielewski had been at BYU earlier, and had been a faculty member in the theatre program—Cinematic Arts or whatever it was called at that particular point—but it wasn't formalized. They didn't have a curriculum, they were just offering a few classes.

It was established so there was a curriculum, and was a BFA program, an MFA program, and a PhD program. Now looking back on that, I have no idea how they thought they were ever going to take care of all that. We're lucky that now we can actually do an undergraduate program. But that was the theory, so they were offering all that stuff.

People were transitioning out of the Motion Picture Studio—some were being asked to leave because it had been the slide show era, a very much industrial educational production venture. I remember coming to the studio, maybe the first day. I walked in on the stage, and it was full of junk. There were maybe one hundred four-drawer files, and there were desks—half of the stage was full of desks

and stuff. I think it was a storage unit for campus to put unusable furniture in. It was the same building as now, but the stage was full of stuff.

I spent probably two weeks trying to clean off the stage, because then the whole idea was that we were going to make movies. We hired all kinds of new people, and all those people now became instructors for the film program. Gordon Lonsdale, who came on, taught cinematography and lighting classes. I think maybe Grant Williams also taught some lighting classes, though I'm not sure if he did or not. Jim Dearden and Pete Czerny were teaching editing classes; I can't remember exactly who was doing what. It was the beginning of an attempt to try to bring the facility back to life.

On campus, I think Sharon Swenson came a little bit later. I can't remember the sequence. Sharon came in '88, so that was six years later. Dean Duncan came in '84. Who was teaching theory classes? Brian Sullivan, and later Paul Nibley did. Tad Danielewski was doing some stuff then.

I can't remember if Brian Sullivan actually ever graduated from a film program somewhere, but I know that Paul Nibley got an MFA out of Columbia, so that gave him some credentials. We were trying to patch things together then, and of course over the years since that time. I was there for around eight years, and there was a downsizing—if you are talking from the management side of things; there are a lot of other terms for it—a purge took place. That's when I came up on campus, and I was less at the Motion Picture Studio. Then I was full-time up on campus, and we continued to build and tried to find resources and new faculty members.

Between '84 and '92, which was just eight years, there was a lot of evolution. We went from one full-time faculty member to four or five over a ten to twelve year period, which is unheard of on this campus. So that's how the program came together.

Peter was interesting. Peter basically got a master's in theatre at BYU. Then he went off to Los Angeles to work with Karl Malden, as his dialogue coach, I think. While he was there, he picked up some crafts and got into the director's guild. So Peter was hired to come back to BYU, but I don't think Peter had any history or theoretical training, other than what he picked up doing the Hollywood thing. He came back prepared to do a film program.

His idea was very practical. He was a practitioner, and he designed a program that—well, he drifted to the fine arts end of the spectrum. He was less interested in history, theory, and the things that come from that side of the program. We try to keep a solid balance of that, and most kids who come here need to understand that they're going to get the history, theory, and the general grounded, broad academic experience. Then they can add on to it if they want to.

There were opportunities to do so, but I don't think we veered that way, though that was the way to do it. We give them more life skills and more opportunities to make choices down the road than if we were just to send out a bunch of students with some sort of skill base. We set up a whole series of hoops which force kids to come along our way. Not only in the selection process in how they have to apply and everything else, but by the time they get selected, they're pretty clear about the fact that we want them to be able to think and read and write—which are far more important skills than whether or not you can put a C-stand up right.

They still come—I don't know what it is. I guess there's the idea that any kid can pick up a camera and go tell a story, right? So they figure that's enough, they don't have to understand the tradition and the culture and all the rest that comes with a little more of the things we provide for them.

Technology and Changes

Technology has changed the game immensely. It's frightening to Hollywood, to be honest with you. The thing about the film business is that there's always a certain aspect of exclusivity about it. There are only a

few people who either have access to the resources, or access to the distribution venues, or access to the tools; and technology has changed that game. Hollywood is reeling a bit, because I don't think they know what to do. It's also become very expensive to distribute a film. So Hollywood is terrified. The interest is to take a proven idea—theme, story, whatever it is—and milk it as much as they possibly can, and then do multiple versions of the same theme, because they're fearful of trying something new.

These kinds of tools have made it possible for all kinds of people to do all kinds of things. But the challenge is, then, how do you get it to be seen? The Hollywood guys have all of the distribution venues sewn up. We'll see what happens over the next few years, but I believe there's going to have to be some different ways of getting content to people.

When you think about information technology and the impact it's having on the world, we're going to see a huge change. There'll be a huge change at the university level, as well as elsewhere, because it's not possible anymore to spend four years to get a degree that you're probably never going to use. It's dangerous, because the world's moving so fast.

I was reading the paper this morning—I may have the article in my pocket—by Thomas Freeman, who writes for the *New York Times*. The article is about the fact that if you think about where all of the value is—I'm talking about the stock value of companies—it's in Facebook, it's in Groupon, it's in LinkedIn. It's in all these things that don't exist. They don't even employ people, right?

The whole point is "I don't want to employ anybody, I don't want to give them benefits, so I want to use technology as much as I possibly can to eliminate that side."

There's going to be a problem at some point; we've got a political problem right now, and the guys in Washington are trying to figure it out, and they are playing games with each other. The Democrats are living the 1950s, and the Republicans are living in the 1970s, and we're in the 2010s. We're not even thinking properly about how this world is going to evolve, and what kinds of tools we are going to give to kids to help them figure out how to make choices—choices on the run, while you're really running fast. Are we giving people what they need to have?

When I was talking to the executive committee, I said, "Look, if we're going to continue doing what we're doing and claim that we have any viability, then we've got to start doing more new media things."

We can't continually do traditional narrative things—that's a track that you can go on, or there's a documentary track, but what's television anymore? You have to ask these questions, and I think that we're in for a shock. I'm frightened for people who aren't thinking more aggressively about how they're going to have to adapt.

If we made a decision about teaching tools—you teach a tool and say, "Good luck, I hope you can operate the camera and you can find a job." Maybe we're better off figuring out how to teach life skills.

We're so old, how do we know what life skills are for kids that are in their twenties? Maybe the conversation has to be much more open. Can we turn some of these young kids loose as we figure out what courses ought to be taught in the coming three years?

Some students who graduated last year came to me and said, "These kids need to know how to work the YouTube world."

I said, "Yes, they do."

We had something of a program in place to do new media stuff; it was there for a while and then drifted away. I think we ought to find some aggressive students who are going to be here and hang around, but are on the front edge of all of this business, and say to them, "Look, we need to make some adjustments."

We still need to do the historical and theoretical stuff, and try to figure out how that applies to the emerging world. But we're not servicing anyone if we don't get out from under our conception of what the university is, because everything's going to change immensely.

While trying to find something this morning, I was digging around in some piles, throwing some stuff away that I had no idea why I kept—but who knows why you keep things. I came across a big thick binder of stuff that had to do with storytelling. It started into folktales and all the stuff out there that is basically a thousand years of cultural understanding—or whatever you want to call it: the wisdom of humanity.

I don't think we're reading enough. I don't know how to get us to read more, because I'm not sure what to choose. But you ought to be reading widely and broadly enough that you're informing yourself, so whoever you are matches—whatever you pull in, and whatever you learn in your academic situation, is somehow a part of the soup that is the emerging you. You can't leave that behind—you can't leave all of that cultural richness behind; whoever you are, Germanic or whatever, pick your poison. I don't think you can leave it behind, but I don't know how to pick and choose either. I think you have to immerse yourself as much as you possibly can.

That's one thing I did well. I made a choice to read when I came to school; I took an English major and I read all types of stuff. I read philosophy and other kinds of things, which was worlds away from where I'd come from—I mean, in Woodland, Utah, if you could shoe a horse and shoot a gun, you were fine. But that's a little bit of the 19th century, as opposed to the 20th. Someday those skills may come of value, if I'm still alive when everything collapses, but you need to have all of that reading, because that helps to sort out who you are. Just operating a camera is not going to do it.

We've talked about it: everything's just a repeat of something that's happened sometime, someplace else, and we just need to be aware of that.

Colleagues at BYU

Sharon Swenson—now there is an interesting person. I really have an affection for Sharon. We've spent a lot of time together over the years because we've had multiple rotations through the associate chair position. We have, for lack of a better word, "mauled" the curriculum more than once. But I love her because she is so bright and yet doesn't believe she's so bright, so she carries that burden with her. She's always trying to bring her brightness into the lights, which is a little bit complicating.

What do I want to say beyond that? She's provided the students with an interesting look at a female who looks like she's from the '40s, but who has a real sense of humor—and nothing gets by her in terms of both the past and the present. She stays pretty alert to what's going on around her. Of course, she's had some sorrows in her life, which have given her some real understanding about the complexities of life. But she really loves students. She has helped students who probably couldn't have been helped any other way. Even though we all cringe sometimes at the whole theoretical thing, she certainly has immersed students in some experience that they'll probably never forget, and probably shouldn't forget.

She's been—we call her Mother Earth, or whatever you want to call her, for being a core and center that we've rotated around. It will probably change and shift in the future, but I think that that's what she's brought.

Chuck Metten—well, I didn't quite know what to do with Chuck, even though I've had a good relationship with him over the years. He's been a bit of a proselytizer. He's really a theater guy at heart, who has liked to play in films and in the film world—in film history.

He had a conviction—that this film program was something that needed to be done. It *was* something that needed to be done. He advocated it and nurtured all kinds of relationships, not only among students, but with the administration.

He's all about celebrity a bit, but that's okay. I mean, would we have ever had our experience with some of the celebrities he brought in if he hadn't been there to encourage it? Some of us aren't necessarily too high on celebrity moments, so he had to be there to bring it about. Harold was a supporter, but Chuck was the proselytizer, as far as I can tell.

Dave Scheerer was an early faculty member at BYU. He actually came as an MFA candidate, and he worked at the Motion Picture Studio when I was there, early on. He probably came in '85 or '86. He finished up his MFA and then, as we were looking for candidates to expand the film faculty, he seemed like a reasonable candidate, so he was hired. He was dedicated to, very committed to, students.

Those early years were tough—it seems like it's easier to be a faculty member when there's five or six faculty members. It's very difficult to be a faculty member when there's only one or two. There are so many eyes on you, and the pressure of “Can you accomplish everything you want to accomplish?” And your vision may not necessarily be the vision of others. I can't even retrace everything that took place, but I know that he wasn't happy when he decided to go take another position. But his contribution was valuable and helpful early on in stabilizing the program.

We are creative people, and Dave falls into that slot; he always saw himself as a director. He wanted to give students everything that they possibly could have.

Maybe that's where I differ a little bit, because I was always of the opinion that people should mind what they have—we talked about that in terms of less is more. I might be a depression baby, but I think I'm probably just my mother's baby. She's a depression baby, and besides that, she's Scandinavian, having come from Denmark—it's all about sweeping up sticks in the barnyard, about taking what you've got and making more out of it. Maybe that's what I'm a product of.

Stan Ferguson—Stan's a bit like Dave, in terms of how he advocated for students. Some students that were somewhat self-centered and wanted what they wanted, so they'd commit to do a ten-minute film and it'd end up being thirty. That was okay, because it emerged and found its way, and you can certainly make that kind of an argument. But it was not a philosophy I was necessarily going to support or espouse, because I was always worried about where the money and resources were going to come from, and “Why did Student A get that and Student D got nothing?” I was all about trying to spread out the resources.

But I've always found it to be a necessary tension. Even inside Hollywood, even inside the structure of filmmaking, that tension is always there. You have a producer and you find some money, and the first thing the producer does is hires a director and then find somebody to manage the director, which is the production manager or the line producer. They have to figure out how to work it out, because there's only so much to work with. That's a healthy place to be. I don't think it's any different than you find when you go home: there's only so much and you have to figure out how to do it. It's managing your own personal financial affairs. We need to see an evolution of the program a little bit with this.

Thomas Russell—I first met Tommy when he was a student at BYU because I was at the Motion Picture Studio. Wasn't he a film student? Comms student? Philosophy, maybe? I don't know what his major was. He showed up at the Motion Picture Studio one day with Jeff Simpson, as I recall, and that's the first time I ever met him. We struck up a relationship, and then he went off and did his thing, as only Tommy can do. Then when we were looking for people to bring back to us—it's a challenge to find people to work at BYU because you want to have someone who understands what BYU is about, and it seems to make more sense that they're members of the church and those sorts of things. I think he had taken some

classes from Swenson, so as we were trying to figure out what the next steps were, we found him, and he was interested in coming back.

Tommy's really interesting; he's just so charming that you can hardly withstand it. It makes it hard to disagree with him about anything. I think that what he's done in terms of figuring out how to manage students, and he really wants students to be able to take responsibility for themselves. He doesn't babysit his students; he wants them to grow up. He asks a lot of them, as opposed to some others who've been here, who pull students in—they nurture them and they become like their little club. He doesn't do anything like that.

I think he basically says, "You've been here for four years; let's see if you can be an adult." He demands that type of perspective from them.

Jeff is a bit different than Tommy, in terms of how he involves himself with students. He's very much a nurturer. When he arrived here I said to him, "You're going to burn yourself out with an open-door policy."

It was, "Come in and I'm going to tell you everything that you should hear about yourself that's really positive and helpful." I think he's a bit like Stan, because Stan was like that. Stan was very much about nurturing and being helpful.

I'm not that kind of guy. I try to be considerate and helpful, but I'm not about building a club. But some people need that kind of thing to blossom. People who are artistic in disposition like to mentor—they like to take someone on as an apprentice, and they want to teach them everything they know. They want to pass on their wisdom and their insight and their perspective. I've seen it multiple times.

I see it all the time at the Motion Picture Studio. If you want help from them, there are people down there who want to work with students and share things with them—and want to be put on their imaginary list of favorite "uncles," I guess, if you want to use that term. I don't think it's necessarily always vanity.

The film business in some ways is a chief-and-Indians thing: you have the director who's the chief—and the producer could probably be a chief if he wanted to, if he'd spend that much time worrying about it. But it's the director who clearly is the chief; on a set the director and the cinematographer are the people everything hovers around. I don't think all of the craftspeople who are doing the behind-scenes work feel like they're actually making that big a contribution, so what they do instead is educate people. They've acquired the skills and they want to pass them on to someone else. It's not necessarily about them wanting to be a chief; I think it's them wanting to offer something to people. It is devotion.

We've actually tried to instill that sort of thing in terms of skill-related things, where you try to require a particular level of expertise. You could make a case that we could easily go back to the middle ages if the world wasn't moving at the speed it's moving. I don't know how you slow down this world we're in now, technology being the way it is, but I think there is something about a slower, meditative way of acquiring a skill, and being apprenticed to someone to learn something.

I think some of that's at play in terms of how Stan and Jeff see the world. I think they're trying hard to pass on everything they've learned—as a master to some apprentices they're trying to nurture.

Sterling Van Wagenen—doesn't he get enough praise as it is? I opened up the *Communications* magazine, and his pictures are all over the place. He did the Sundance thing and got so much credibility from that; it's like a giving tree that never goes away. Every time you turn around, he's put up on a pedestal.

Daryl Larsen—Daryl's a puzzle to me. I've been around him for years, but he's a bit—I think he only shows a piece of himself. I don't know what happens at his house—he has all those kids who are usually taking some edges off. He has a tremendous sense of humor.

If there's someone who really cares about students, it's Daryl. He came to my office yesterday to talk about a student who graduated years ago, Student X, who is having difficulties. If there's anybody students come back to after they've gone, and keep a relationship with, it's with Daryl. There's something—there's a connection he makes with them that's more fundamental and more primal, I guess, in a spiritual sense. He was very worried about this person and wanted to know if we could find a class for him to teach or something.

I said, "I don't know if I trust Student X with what he would have to teach the students, because they might not survive the class."

But he was trying to figure out how he could help him. I'm not sure we can help him, but that's what Daryl brings. He also has historical interests and all that sort of business, and he knows his history.

You want to get emails back from Daryl Larsen, because he's always figured out how to take whatever and move it into a different place. Shrink it, focus it, and add a little humor.